



News Release

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Interpretation Services Available for Medicaid Clients

Brochures Now in Eight Languages

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Language barriers are coming down for Medicaid, CHIP and PCN clients, and the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) believes it will lead to better medical care.

The UDOH Center for Multicultural Health (CMH) has developed an informational brochure in eight of the most widely spoken languages in Utah. The brochure tells those speaking Spanish, Cambodian, Chinese, Farsi, German, Russian, Somali and Vietnamese how they can get an interpreter to help them learn about their health insurance benefits and even arrange for an interpreter at doctor appointments.

Free interpretation services have been available to clients in the Medicaid, Primary Care Network and Children's Health Insurance Programs for some time, but clients and even many physicians were unaware of the benefit.

“Language barriers very likely play a role in minority patients’ poorer general health, lower satisfaction with medical care and less frequent preventive care,” said April Young Bennett, multicultural health specialist, CMH. “As I meet health care providers across the state, many tell me they had no idea free medical interpretation was available.”

Medicaid records show that just two percent of enrollees used the benefit in 2007. Since 14 percent of Utahns speak a language other than English at home, UDOH officials believe many Medicaid, CHIP and PCN clients who need the benefit are not accessing it.

In a 2005 survey, racial and ethnic minority Medicaid and CHIP clients rated “doctor communication” and “helpfulness of clinic office staff” lower than did other clients. Minority parents of children in Medicaid and CHIP reported that their children have poorer health but fewer doctors’ visits than other enrolled children.

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Research shows a lack of professional medical interpretation can lead to poor diagnoses, more expensive testing, more frequent hospital admissions, lower use of preventive care, ethical compromises and adverse health consequences.

Bennett stresses that medical interpretation is not just for people who have not learned English. “It’s difficult to use a second language during stressful times when you are sick or injured,” said Bennett. “And even those who are proficient in English as a second language can be unfamiliar with complex medical terminology.”

In 1998, Utah led the nation by becoming one of the first states to cover medical interpretation for Medicaid clients. In 2000, President Bill Clinton and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) urged all states to adopt the benefit to comply with federal law that prohibits discrimination based on country of origin. In Utah, more than 70 percent of interpretation costs are paid through federal match money, not Utah tax dollars.

Health program clients and providers can download the new brochures at <http://www.health.utah.gov/cmh/multilinguallibrary/topic/multicultural.htm>. Printed copies are available by calling 1-888-222-2542 or e-mailing cmh@utah.gov. To learn more about translation benefits, call Medicaid at 1-800-662-9651 or visit <http://health.utah.gov/medicaid/provhtml/interpreter.html>.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.